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ABSTRACT

Data from 44 respondents in a survey of the 50 largest academic members of the Association of Research Libraries and the four largest black university libraries are analyzed in this report on reference services. Included in the analysis are data on reference and directional transactions collected by the fall 1976 LIBGIS survey for the institutions surveyed here. Discussion focuses on staff size and functions, new services, organization of reference departments, and reference collections. Findings indicate a lack of uniformity in tasks assigned to reference departments at large university libraries, differences in established norms for staff size resulting from this lack of uniformity, and a need for more comparative data. The percentage of departments responsible for each of 17 tasks is provided in Table 1. Data for each responding library presented in Table 2 include responsibilities of the reference department, staff size, size of library collection, university enrollment, and size of faculty. (KP)

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Report on Reference Services in Large Academic Libraries

by

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In 1974 a few heads of reference departments at large university libraries began to take action to create a forum within RASD for discussion of questions of mutual concern. An Ad-Hoc Committee on Reference Services in Large Academic Libraries was established to investigate the possibility of forming a Discussion Group on Reference Services in Large Research Libraries to consist of the fifty largest ARL academic libraries, the four largest black university libraries, New York Public and the Library of Congress. Since the RASD by-laws had no provision for the formation of discussion groups, a change in the by-laws was necessary before the Discussion Group could gain official status in 1975.

A need was quickly perceived for information concerning the organization of reference services in member libraries. A questionnaire to obtain the desired information was prepared for distribution to the academic members of the Group at the American Library Association meeting in summer, 1976. A follow-up questionnaire was mailed in February, 1977. Forty-five of the fifty-four academic member reference departments responded. The questionnaire assumed the existence of a central reference department close to the union catalog for the university library system and to the general research collection. Since reference services at University of British Columbia and at MIT are decentralized, responses from these two institutions were not readily comparable with those from schools at which more centralized services exist. They are therefore not included in this report.

Staff Size and Functions

It was originally hoped that an important product of the survey would be comparative data on staff size which could be used by administrators of member university libraries for decisions concerning appropriate staffing levels for their reference departments. However, differences in the organization of reference services in the various libraries make it difficult to compare staff size from department to department. Missouri and Louisiana State, for example, are organized along divisional lines and provided combined information for all divisional reference points in their libraries. Several libraries reported data, as indicated, for the unit in their organizational structure most closely resembling the authors' preconceived model of a "central reference unit." Presumably, variations in the amount of reference service given outside these units will affect comparison of them with the other reference departments surveyed. Indeed it is probable that none of the departments responding gives all the reference service available on its university campus. The reader can assume, however, that, unless otherwise indicated, all departments provide the major part of humanities, social science and general reference service.

Departments differ even more widely in functions than in organization. These differences compound the difficulties of establishing norms of reference department staff size. Respondents were questioned as to whether their departments perform various tasks believed likely to be the responsibility of academic reference departments. These tasks are listed in Table 1 along with the percentage of departments performing them.

While some of the responsibilities listed in Table 1 are unlikely to have a great influence on the size of reference department staffs, others require large amounts both of professional and of clerical time. In this category are interlibrary loan operations, book selection for the general collection, maintenance of documents and microform collections (particularly when respon-

sibility includes acquisition for the general collection), bibliographic instruction activities and computer-aided information retrieval. Table 2 shows which departments perform these time-consuming functions and also gives the numbers of professional and support staff in each unit. Data on library collection size, size of user community served, and volume of interlibrary lending and borrowing are also provided for comparative purposes.

A statistical analysis using computer subroutines from the IBM Scientific Subroutine Package was performed on the data in Table 2 and on additional data as indicated below in order to determine if correlations exist which are not evident from a visual inspection of the Table. A multiple regression analysis was carried out to discover whether total staff size or professional staff size can be predicted with acceptable statistical significance from a knowledge of the following independent variables: (1) quantity of interlibrary lending; (2) quantity of interlibrary borrowing; (3) total library collection size; (4) university enrollment; (5) faculty size; (6) hours in work week; (7) hours on the desk per professional ; and (8) volumes added to the total library collection. We also included in this analysis data on reference and directional transactions collected by the fall 1976 LIBGIS Survey for the institutions surveyed here.[1] This data is a measure of total campus reference service and was therefore considered only as a first estimate of quantifiable service offered by central reference departments. Variables (1), (2) and (8) were of course included only for those departments which performed these functions. "Volumes added" figures were viewed as the roughest guide to the magnitude of the selection responsibility in the various departments. The multiple regression analyses were performed for the entire group of libraries in Table 2 and for subgroups responsible for like functions.

The statistical results generated in the above manner indicate that staff size cannot be predicted with meaningful statistical significance from variables (1) through (8), nor from available measures of the quantity of reference service given. It is possible that historical and/or local peculiarities are the dominant factors in determining staff size. However, a number of other variables, which the questionnaire did not attempt to measure, may also be important influences. For example, responses to the questionnaire clearly indicated a wide variation in staff effort devoted to formal instructional activity from department to department. The LAD LOMS Committee on Statistics for Reference Services considers such information a sufficiently important measure of reference service to have recommended its inclusion in future LIBGIS surveys.[2] A more thorough analysis of reference department staff size than is intended here should certainly include consideration of this variable. Consideration should also be given to differences in the volume of computer searching done and in the proportion of total campus service in this area provided by the departments which offer this service. In addition, the existence of undergraduate libraries and large departmental libraries on many of the campuses served by the reference dpeartments surveyed will certainly affect the quantity of service given and, therefore, the size of these departments. The potential exists to take these factors into account. A measure of the proportion of total campus reference service provided by centralized departments could be derived from the source of the data on campus-wide reference transactions which was collected for the first time by the 1976 LIBGIS Survey.

Also, a prediction model for reference department staff size would ideally include some measure of the proportion of responsibility for the building of the general collection which rests with the reference departments that perform

this function. Some departments may do most of the selection for the general collection; others may acquire books in a few areas only. Among those departments reporting selection responsibilities, the norm for time spent on these tasks appears to be about twenty percent of staff time. Considerable variation exists, however. One department, for example, indicated a responsibility for classics only, one indicated that three of twelve staff members devote full time to general collection building, one indicated four of 8.5 staff members so occupied, and one specified that fifty percent of the time of all eleven staff members is spent in general selection. Certainly it would be important to know what the typical pattern is for the organization of the general selection responsibility in academic reference departments. The present study emphasizes the difficulties involved in determining the optimum size for a reference department serving a university community of a certain size. More work is required either to quantify the variables described above or to isolate for analysis those services which can only be performed by reference librarians and to study the numbers of staff needed to perform them.

New Services

Respondents were asked to list services added during the last five years. Four activities were frequently cited. About half of the reference departments surveyed indicated that they had either initiated a program of bibliographic instruction or had greatly increased their teaching role. The same percentage specified the addition of computer-aided information retrieval and several more mentioned that these services were soon to be offered. About a fifth of the units have expanded their informational services by adding campus information sites or catalog information desks. The same fraction have increased outreach

efforts directed at specific user groups. Several departments, for example, have recently begun preparing selective acquisitions lists for distribution to various academic departments.

Many departments, however, seem to be channeling most of their creative energies into developing new instructional services. Eighty-six percent of reference departments consider themselves to be offering a formal program of library instruction. Only three of the remaining units describe themselves as taking the more passive role of providing lectures on demand as opposed to initiating contacts and arranging activities. Only one responded that insufficient staff exist to give instruction other than on a one-to-one basis. About one quarter of the departments devote sufficient amounts of staff time to teaching to require that a specific staff member be designated as coordinator of instructional activities. Most departments offer instruction primarily to graduate students and undergraduate majors. Of those offering instruction to these groups, but not to incoming freshmen, all but one are in library systems which include a separate undergraduate library. Several specified that the undergraduate library has the responsibility for freshman instruction. Tours and classroom lectures (or lectures to classes in the library) are the most popular forms of instruction. Fifty-one percent of the departments offer tours to incoming freshmen, fifty-eight percent to undergraduate majors and sixty-seven percent to graduate students. Nineteen percent give lectures on library skills to incoming freshmen, fifty-one percent to undergraduate majors and fifty-three percent to graduate students. Workshop sessions are offered by a third of the departments to graduate students and undergraduate majors. Full-length courses are offered to graduate students and undergraduate majors by only two departments. Short-courses are provided for undergraduate majors

by two departments and for graduate students by five departments. Four departments make consultation services available to dissertation students by appointment and two allow the same opportunity to majors. Slide-tape presentations are provided by only five departments. Neither programmed instruction, nor term paper clinics are frequent offerings of the reference departments surveyed.

Organization of Reference Departments

The survey explored various aspects of the organization of reference departments, including the use of non-professional staff, the delegation of administrative responsibility, and the scheduling of work. There has long been debate among reference librarians as to whether it is appropriate to employ non-professionals to handle even the most routine reference transactions. Respondents were asked to indicate if non-professionals or students were assigned in their departments to check the main catalog for location information and to answer ready-reference questions during regular daytime hours. Seventy-two percent replied that non-professionals were employed for catalog checks and fifty-eight percent responded that this task was also performed by students. Sixty percent of departments use non-professionals in routine ready-reference encounters and forty-two percent use students. Non-professionals and students are also used heavily in routine interlibrary loan searching. Seventy-three percent of departments responsible for interlibrary loan services use non-professionals for ordinary searching and fifty percent use students to perform this function. Non-professionals are also assigned in eighty-four percent of departments to reference department catalog maintenance. In twenty-six percent of departments students are assigned to this task. Reference work has perhaps a greater potential for being wholly

professional in nature than other kinds of library work. It appears that most of the departments surveyed here are attempting to assure that this potential is realized.

Many academic libraries are structured so that career development is linked to the assumption of administrative responsibility. The questionnaire was aimed at determining the extent to which opportunities are provided in large reference departments for librarians other than the head to take on administrative tasks. About half the departments surveyed have an assistant head of department and about a quarter, as indicated above, have a coordinator for instructional activities. In six departments, associate librarians share administrative responsibility with the head and, in a few departments, each librarian has an assigned administrative task (e.g., responsibility for microforms or documents). A commonly delegated assignment is the training of non-professional staff. Heads are involved in training of clerks or students in only seven of the forty-three departments. In most departments, training is the charge of a single designated staff member.

The questionnaire also sought to determine the extent to which book selection is an organized activity in reference departments and also the likelihood that full responsibility is centered in the head of the department. Seven departments responded that the head is fully responsible for reference collection development and five responded that the responsibility is completely delegated to another staff member. When the assignment is shared by the entire staff, the more common arrangement is to divide the effort by subject. In ten of the sixteen departments in which responsibility is divided by subject, selections by reference librarians must be approved by the head before purchase. In four departments, reference librarians can individually initiate purchases

and, in two, purchases are made both with approval and on individual initiative. The less common organization of acquisitions activities is to assign different selection tools to staff members. Eight departments follow this procedure. In five of these, purchases are made only with approval of the head, in two, they are made with approval and on individual initiative and in one, they are made on individual initiative. Two departments appear to have no formalized organization of collection building activities and the remaining units employ various combinations of the arrangements described above.

Work weeks in reference departments range from thirty-five to forty hours. Librarians in seventy percent of departments spend forty or more percent of their time scheduled at the desk. In most departments, the head and other staff members with administrative responsibility have fewer scheduled desk hours. The typical reference librarian works one night per week and one to two weekend days per month. In all but four departments, reference librarians are compensated for these special hours only with equal time off

Reference Collections

The size of the reference collections in the large academic libraries surveyed varies from four thousand to approximately sixty-five thousand volumes. The average size is about thirty-one thousand volumes. Departments add an average of approximately twelve hundred volumes per year.

Summary

The study reported here emphasizes the lack of uniformity in the tasks assigned to reference departments in large university libraries. It also demonstrates the consequent difficulties of establishing norms for staff size

and the need for more comparative data. The establishment of staff-size norms is important in light of likely developments in university library organization. It is generally believed, for example, that advances in library automation will free large numbers of technical services staff in many research libraries for public services activities. At the same time, current economic pressures will force institutions to justify such shifts in responsibility with careful documentation. Reliable predictors of staff requirements will be needed to make these justifications. Considerable sharing of information among reference departments is required to develop these predictors. The formation of the Discussion Group and its early activities are important steps in this necessary process.

References

[1]Thanks are due to Dr. Frank Schick and Mr. Arthur Podolsky of the National Center for Education Statistics for making advance data available from the 1976 LIBGIS Survey.

[2]Emeron, Katherine. "National Reporting of Reference Transactions, 1976-78," RQ v.16, no.3 (Spring, 1977) p.205.

Table 1. Responsibilities of Reference Departments in Large Academic Libraries.

Task	Percentage of Departments Responsible
Interlibrary lending	33
Interlibrary borrowing	44
Interlibrary loan photoduplication	26
Maintaining document collection	33
Maintaining microform collection	23
Computer-aided information retrieval	56[1]
Library instruction programs	60[2]
Selection for the general collection	51
Preparing individualized bibliographies	47
Preparing general subject bibliographies	81
Preparing library publications	81
Maintaining a current periodical section	30
Maintaining a vertical file	70
Issuing library permits	23
Preparing regular exhibits	28
Providing undergraduate reference service	58[3]
Providing catalog information	70[4]

Footnotes to Table 1

[1]The questionnaire did not specifically ask if computer-aided information retrieval services were offered. While many departments supplied this information in the process of answering other questions, both Table 1 and Table 2 may underestimate the number of departments offering these services.

[2]The questionnaire attempted to distinguish between those departments engaged in orientation efforts and those engaged in bibliographic instruction. Both Table 1 and Table 2 record only departments involved in formalized bibliographic instruction activities.

[3]Reference departments are considered to be fully responsible for undergraduate reference service if there is no undergraduate library on the campus which they serve or if there is an undergraduate library which does not offer reference service.

[4]Reference departments are considered to be fully responsible for catalog information if they staff separate catalog information desks or if there is no separate catalog information desk in their libraries.

Table 2

Reference Departments Grouped by Labor-Intensive Services Offered: Staff Size, Size of Library Collection, University Enrollment, Size of Faculty Served.

Institution	# FTE Librarians	# FTE Clerical Staff	# FTE Student Assistants	Total FTE Staff	RESPONSIBILITIES OF: Interlibrary Lending[1]	Interlibrary Borrowing[1]	Interlibrary Loan Photoduplication	Documents Collection[2]	General Selection[3]
Yale	10.5	14.0	5.6	30.1	19.9	3.0	X	X*	
NYU	16.0	3.0	.6	19.6	3.9	2.0	X	X*	
Syracuse	10.5	5.5	8.9	24.9	3.6	3.1	X	X*	
Brown	11.0	2.0	1.1	14.1	5.1	2.2	X		X+
Wash., Mo.	9.0	5.0	1.0	15.0	10.9	5.1	X	X	X+
Indiana	6.0	5.0	2.6	13.6	29.4	14.4	X		
UCLA	10.0	7.5	5.3	22.8	58.5	5.8	X		
McGill	10.5	9.0	.3	19.8	35.4	7.8	X		
Iowa	10.5	2.75	.8	14.1	11.5	5.0	X		
Howard	5.0				X	X	X		
Kansas	6.5	3.0	.6	10.1	16.7	3.5			X
Arizona	9.0	6.0	1.8	16.8	6.4	3.2			X
Chicago	5.8	2.0	-	7.8	5.4	6.5			
Toronto	17.0	2.5	1.7	21.2		11.0		X*	
Michigan St.	14.0	5.25	3.0	22.3		4.5		X*	
Cornell	6.75	3.0	2.3	12.1		6.0			
Illinois	7.0	2.0	1.4	10.4		7.0			
Alberta	9.0	6.0	.1	15.1					X+
California	8.5[7]	2.0	1.3	11.8					X+
SUNY-Buf.[8]	11.0[7]	1.5	1.6	14.1					X+
Ohio State	7.5	2.5	1.2	11.2				X	X+
Minnesota	7.5	1.25	2.5	11.2					X+
Wayne St.[8]	12.0[7]	3.0	1.2	16.2					X+
Duke	6.66	2.0	.8	9.4					X+
Cincinnati	8.0	2.0	.8	10.8					X+

REFERENCE DEPARTMENTS			Volumes in Library[4] (millions)	Total Enrollment[5]	# Faculty Served[6]
Computer Searching	Library Instruction	Microform Collection			
	X	X	6.6	9,734	734
X		X	2.5	29,698	904
X		X	1.5	21,067	820
X			1.5	6,766	436
X			1.5	11,359	497
X	X		3.9	32,651	1,199
X	X		3.5	60,127	N.A.
	X		1.7	18,354	1,178
		X	1.9	23,036	1,007
			.8	9,455	N.A.
X	X		1.8	22,194	929
X	X		1.7	29,149	962
	X		3.6	9,480	778
X	X	X	4.4	44,715	2,087
X	X		2.1	48,488	2,005
	X		4.3	16,541	1,470
			5.5	36,845	2,050
X	X		1.6	23,054	1,268
X	X		4.7	34,809	N.A.
X	X		1.5	12,604	993
X	X		3.0	50,146	1,611
X			3.6	66,887	1,568
X			1.6	38,073	1,156
	X		1.6	9,165	529
			2.6	34,885	N.A.

Reference Departments Grouped by Labor-Intensive Services Offered:
Staff Size, Size of Library Collection, University Enrollment, Size of Faculty Served.

Institution	# FTE Librarians	# FTE Clerical Staff	# FTE Student Assistants	Total FTE Staff	RESPONSIBILITIES OF: Interlibrary Lending[1]	Interlibrary Borrowing[1]	Interlibrary Loan Photoduplication	Documents Collection[2]	General Selection[3]
Michigan	11.0	2.5	2.7	16.2				X*	X+
J. Hopkins	9.5	N.A.		N.A.				X*	X
Virginia	6.0	1.5	1.3	8.8				X*	
Wisconsin	5.0	2.5	.5	8.0				X*	
Pennsylvania	9.0	0.	2.0	11.0					X
Penn. State	7.75	2.5	.6	10.8					X
Princeton	7.0	1.0	.5	8.5					X
Case Western	3.0		.8	3.8					
Northwestern	7.5	1.5	2.5	11.5					
Pittsburgh[9]	3.5	2.0	.3	5.8					
Columbia	6.0		N.A.	N.A.					
Texas	6.0	2.5	1.8	10.3					X
Rutgers[8]	4.0[10]	.5	1.0	5.5					
No. Caro.[11]	4.5	2.0	3.7	10.2					
Harvard	6.0		1.1	7.1				X	
So. Illinois	5.0	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.					
La. State[12]	9.0	3.0	3.1	15.1					X+
Missouri[12]	15.0	11.0	N.A.	N.A.		X		X	X
Southern[12]	8.0	3.0	15.4	27.4	X	X	X	X*	X

REFERENCE DEPARTMENTS					
Computer Searching	Library Instruction	Microform Collection	Volumes in Library (millions)[4]	Total Enrollment[5]	# Faculty Served[6]
	X		4.7	37,505	1,720
X		X	2.0	10,111	275
			2.0	26,018	741
			3.0	38,603	1,388
X	X	X	2.6	20,380	1,072
X	X		1.8	40,102	2,234
			2.7	4,103	579
X	X	X	1.6	8,688	617
X	X		2.4	15,390	830
X	X		2.0	29,729	1,032
X	X		4.7	15,460	806
X			3.7	45,429	1,589
	X		1.8	30,993	1,955
	X		2.1	20,615	1,073
			9.2	20,498	826
			1.8	21,214	917
			1.5	25,617	942
	X		1.8	26,190	1,932
	X	X	.3	13,915	432

Footnotes to Table 2

[1]Statistics for interlibrary lending and borrowing are provided in these columns for institutions at which reference departments are responsible for these activities. Data are in thousands rounded to the nearest tenth. Source is ARL Statistics 1974-75 (Washington, Association of Research Libraries, 1975).

[2]The questionnaire did not provide the opportunity to indicate the extent of responsibility for documents. Those respondents who made clear that reference either maintained a separate documents center and/or was responsible for documents ordering are starred to indicate substantial demand on staff resources in this area.

[3]Those departments which indicated a heavy commitment of staff time to development of the general library collection are marked with a plus (+). Those so marked report twenty percent or more of staff time devoted to collection development and/or staff members with specific assignments in collection development.

[4]Source: ARL Statistics 1974-75 (Washington, Association of Research Libraries, 1975). Statistics for Southern University and Howard University are taken from National Center for Education Statistics, Library Statistics of Colleges and Universities, Fall, 1973: Institutional Data (Part B) (Washington, 1976). All numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth of a million.

[5]Source: National Center for Education Statistics. Fall Enrollment in Higher Education 1975. Institutional Data. (Washington, 1976). Canadian university data is from Canada. Statistics Canada. Fall enrolment in universities 1974-75 (Ottawa, 1977).

[6]Source: American Association of University Professors, "Nearly Keeping Up: Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 1975-76. AAUP Bulletin, 62, no. 2 (August, 1976), 195-284. Statistics for University of Cincinnati and for Southern University are from National Center for Education Statistics. Numbers of Employees in Institutions of Higher Education: Fall, 1972 (Washington, 1976), Statistics for Canadian universities are from Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Universities and Colleges of Canada 1972 (Ottawa, 1972).

[7]Several staff members have substantial selection responsibilities beyond the reference department collection. At Berkeley four staff members do general book selection, at Wayne State three staff members are so occupied and at SUNY-Buffalo all reference librarians spend half their time on general collection development.

[8]Information given is for the unit in the Library's organizational structure most closely resembling the authors' model of a central reference unit.

[9]At Pittsburgh, Reference is a unit in the Information Services Department. It was necessary to estimate numbers of staff devoted solely to the reference function, since other answers in the questionnaire applied only to Reference as a separate unit. Reference librarians and clerks all have other responsibilities within the Information Services Department, e.g. microforms and documents.

[10]25% of staff time is devoted to cataloguing government publications.

[11]Information given is for the Humanities Reference Department only.

[12]Louisiana State, Missouri and Southern are grouped together since none has a central reference collection. Information given for LSU is for the three divisions: Science, Social Science and Humanities. The six professionals in the Science and Social Sciences Division are responsible for selection in their subject fields. Information for Missouri is for the nine divisional reference points in the main library building.